

HIGH POINT (N. C.)
ENTERPRISE

Circ.: e 24,322
S 24,473

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APR 26 1961

High Point Enterprise
Wed., April 26, 1961

EDITORIAL PAGE

Appraisal Of Intelligence Abilities Is Inescapable

The despairing frustration the United States feels at the failure of the rebel invasion of Cuba should not prohibit us from profiting from that failure. Costly mistakes were made in planning and judgment that call for an unblinking appraisal of the U. S. role in the invasion.

President Kennedy has taken the first step in such an appraisal by assuming full responsibility for the abortive attempt to topple Fidel Castro. This should squelch partisan claims that blame for the ill-conceived assault lies upon former President Eisenhower. The country has experienced enough in recent years of charges of "treason" and of laying the blame for foreign policy failures at the feet of the opposition party.

This does not mean, however, that a thorough review of the Cuban fiasco is not called for. An assessment of U. S. intelligence capabilities in particular appears to be needed. The rebel operation against Cuba was planned and carried out with the backing of the Central Intelligence Agency. Yet, this super-secret spy organization failed completely in judging the situation in Cuba. This failure is made more humiliating for having taken place in an island only

90 miles from our coast and with which Americans have been intimately associated for more than 100 years. Surely we have the right to expect our intelligence operation to know the truth of what is taking place on our doorstep.

The U. S. has been embarrassed by other intelligence lapses in recent years. The most notable was the bad timing of the ill-fated U2 flight of Gary Powers. American intelligence was caught napping by the British-French assault on the Suez Canal, by the revolution in Iraq and by the Hungarian revolution. We may wonder, too, about the accuracy of our intelligence reports from Laos, where our allies have failed to show the degree of alarm that has come from Washington.

The CIA operates with a secret aloofness. It does not have to account for its personnel or for its spending of money to Congress or anyone else in the government. Such absolute autonomy and secrecy is perhaps desirable and necessary in intelligence work. Yet, the CIA should not be above a searching examination of its organization and operation. The time for such an appraisal seems to be now.